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Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station
Department of Horticulture
Division of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture

CARE OF POINSETTIAS IN THE HOME

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The poinsettia is a short-day plant. It requires a period of absolute darkness for at least 12 and one-half hours each night. If any artificial light from incandescent bulbs is allowed to reach the plant during this period, flowering will not occur. This rule applies from the 10th of October until Thanksgiving time during the year of flowering. This is the reason for many failures with home grown poinsettias. Before use can be made of this information, however, it is necessary to have a plant growing vigorously in the fall. In order to do this, plants must receive good care from the time they are purchased at Christmas.

After obtaining a poinsettia plant, it is necessary to keep the soil moist, but not wet. It is poor practice with poinsettias to allow them to stand in a dish of water. They should be watered as needed. Perhaps the most important factor in keeping poinsettias attractive in the home is temperature. House temperatures usually run near 72 to 75 degrees F. The optimum temperature for poinsettias is closer to 60 degrees F. By placing the poinsettia plant in a cool room at night and near a southern or eastern window during the day, much can be done to prolong its useful life.

After the plant has served its useful decorative purpose in the home, it should be slowly dried out and placed in a warm dry place, such as a basement area, and held until spring. The soil must not be allowed to dry to the point of causing the stems to shrivel. In early spring the plants should be cut back to a height of three to four inches, watered, and placed in a position near a southern window so that new growth will occur. After growth has started, the pot can be plunged in soil outside and grown through the summer. Tips of the shoots should be removed periodically so that a branched plant results. The plant can be left out of doors until just before a light frost in the fall. Plants treated in this way will be quite tall, and it would be advantageous if cuttings of four to five inches long were removed from the plant in early August and rooted to make flowering plants for Christmas. This is quite a difficult operation due to the large leaf surface and tendency of the cuttings to wilt. With careful management, however, the cuttings can be rooted in sand and potted in progressively larger pots for Christmas flowering.

Fertilizer applications should be started in early summer and continued until near Thanksgiving time. Soluble fertilizers (tablets or powders) can be effectively used.

Further questions concerning poinsettia culture may be directed to the Department of Horticulture, the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station, Wooster, Ohio.

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